

Preface

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our schools, and be of service in giving our children a wish to pursue the subject of our literary history as they advanced in years and knowledge." The philosophic observer may here remark that our historian, like his innumerable successors, follows the way of all flesh in that when he has abandoned his ideal immediately there bolts into his mind an excellent reason for abandoning it.

A second temptation of the American historian, which appeared long before Knapp and persisted long after him, is to magnify the achievements of one's own parish at the expense of the rest of the country. In Governor Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation* there is hardly a trace of inflation; throughout that grave and noble narrative the Governor cleaves to his purpose to write "in a plain style, with singular regard unto the simple truth in all things." But in Cotton Mather one finds already a local pride that looks disdainfully upon the neighbour colonies and deigns only to compare the New England worthies with the prophets and apostles of Palestine. In the more temperate passages of the *Magnalia Christi Americana* he cultivates the just self-esteem of his section with considerations like these: "I will make no odious comparisons between Harvard College and other universities for the proportion of worthy men therein educated; but New England, compared with other parts of America, may certainly boast of having brought forth very many eminent men, in proportion more than any of them; and of Harvard College (herein truly a Sion College) it may be said, *this and that man were bred there*; of whom not the least was Mr. Thomas Shepard." The local pride, more or less justifiable, which renders tumid the periods of this energetic old Puritan, was a useful passion at a time when literature was obliged to develop independently in widely separated colonies. It is a useful passion still in a country of a hundred million inhabitants separated by such spatial and spiritual intervals as lie between Boston, New York, Richmond, Chicago, New Orleans, and San Francisco. It has stimulated the production of our innumerable "local-colorists" in poetry and prose fiction. It underlies many entertaining books and articles on the New England School, the Knickerbocker School, the Southern School, the Hoosier School, and the rest; but it is not conducive